

Eskimo Display Spurs Demand for Stone Carvings

By EDWARD COWAN

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VANCOUVER, Dec. 19—In six weeks an exhibition of 405 pieces of Canadian Eskimo stone sculptures, the largest ever assembled, attracted 32,775 persons to the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Critics acclaimed the exhibition, and the visitors purchased more than 900 copies of the illustrated catalogue at \$7.50 each.

The exhibition, which closed recently, will move on during the next 16 months to five European cities, Philadelphia and Ottawa. If, on this grand tour, critical and popular acclaim continue to run high, commercial demand for Eskimo stone carvings could increase appreciably. That might not lead to greater production of pieces of a higher order of artistic merit but it presumably would enable a larger num-



ber of Eskimos to support themselves by carving for the popular market.

This prospect of alleviating unemployment and welfare problems that have caused acute distress in many Eskimo settlements and families is one reason the exhibition was organized. Its sponsors are the Governments of Canada and of the

Northwest Territories, the Canada Council, the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council and the National Museum of Man in Ottawa.

The Federal Government contributed \$175,000 in cash, including \$15,000 from the Canada Council, which makes grants to the arts. The Department of National Defense will airlift the exhibition from city to city.

Vancouverites have not flocked to the gallery, which charges adults an admission fee of \$1, in such numbers since the 1967 showing of the art of the Indians of the Pacific Coast. That exhibition, like this one, was conceived by the gallery's curator, Doris Shadbolt.

The exhibition is entitled "Sculpture of the Inuit: Masterworks of the Canadian Arctic." It was assembled from 49 private collections and 18 museums and institu-

tions, including the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both in New York City. "Inuit" is the Eskimos' word for themselves. It means "the people."

For millennia, Eskimos have lived in the least hospitable climate on earth. Well into the 20th century, the struggle for sheer survival in that hostile environment was the dominant fact of Eskimo life. That preoccupation is reflected in Eskimo carvings, which are done in ivory, bone, antler and so-called soapstone—semisoft stone whose color ranges from jet black to pale gray and serpentine. Most of the carvings depict the hunter, the mother-and-child and the Arctic animals that feed, clothe and threaten Eskimos—seals, caribou, polar bear, ducks, musk-oxen, whales, concertina.

As of possible interest in connection with our aborted Eskimo sculpture show.